

Washington, D.C. — During debate today on the House floor over the fiscal year 2004 Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations bill Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) highlighted critical funding shortfalls in addressing cleanup of unexploded ordnance (UXO), proposing to shift funds from the controversial and questionable missile defense program to fund cleanup of UXO. UXO includes bombs, missiles, and landmines that have been used for combat or training but did not explode or which have been buried for disposal.

“UXO threatens our troops and American citizens today,” Blumenauer said. “Missile defense purports to protect us from an imagined threat far in the future. Our research priorities should reflect today’s realities, not science fiction.”

Blumenauer proposed amending the DOD bill to provide \$100 million for Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation of technologies to clean up unexploded ordnance. To fund the UXO clean up research, Blumenauer proposed to cut just one percent of the \$9 billion National Missile Defense System’s most untested and futuristic program - the Ballistic Missile Defense System Interceptor (BMD) Interceptor. Blumenauer withdrew his amendment after receiving assurances that the issue would be addressed during negotiations with the Senate over final funding levels.

During debate, Blumenauer highlighted the dangers from UXO to our troops. Just last week, a constituent of Blumenauer’s was killed in Iraq while clearing landmines. Recent press reports have attributed several other U.S. fatalities and numerous injuries in Iraq to landmines or UXO. Fifteen U.S. soldiers have been killed in or wounded by landmines since military operations in Afghanistan began in 2001. Landmines also caused approximately 30 percent of US casualties in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Blumenauer also argued that UXO threatens civilians around the world, including here in the U.S. He has been a longtime champion of the cleanup of UXO and military toxics, arguing that Congress and the Department of Defense have been too slow in responding to this enormous problem. Last year, Blumenauer successfully inserted language in the DoD Authorization bill requiring the agency to release an inventory of UXO sites around the U.S. The inventory, released in late May, revealed that the actual costs of cleaning up UXO sites just in the United States may eventually reach \$19 billion. The House DoD bill allocates \$6 million for this effort in fiscal year 2004.

“Our troops face the dangers caused by UXO every day overseas and here at home,” Blumenauer said. But, dangerous unexploded ordnance, which can kill our military personnel and civilians alike, is not just a remote danger in some far off land. It’s time to take this threat

seriously and fund it appropriately.”